



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Wisconsin schools prepare response to national disaster

Open letter from State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster to district administrators on relief for victims of Hurricane Katrina and welcoming new students to Wisconsin schools

MADISON—Attached is an open letter from State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster to all Wisconsin school district administrators.

In her letter, Burmaster said, "Some hurricane survivors will make their way to Wisconsin. We welcome them with open arms in the spirit of compassion and solidarity. As we open our schools in welcome and extend assistance to the victims of this national disaster, we hope to bring relief and stability into the lives of so many displaced young people."

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Dear School District Administrators:

We have all watched the horror wrought by Hurricane Katrina over the last week. This national disaster touches so many people in so many ways. Now is the time for us to reach out to the people of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida and do our part in easing the hardship for the victims of this disaster.

Some hurricane survivors will make their way to Wisconsin. We welcome them with open arms in the spirit of compassion and solidarity. Children from the devastated area may arrive at your schools. As you know, these children have a right to immediately enroll in school and to receive all public school services. Count them in your general student enrollment for school aid purposes. If children arrive without parents or legal guardians, a school may not require guardianship or other documents as a condition of enrollment.

It is likely that school records for these children will have been destroyed or will be delayed at best. As a state, school districts, and individual schools, we will make every effort to appropriately place and serve these children based on information provided by the student, family, or friends. Please contact the department if you need technical assistance as particular issues arise.

We will need to be cognizant of the needs of all our students related to this national disaster in the coming weeks. In addition to newly arrived victims, our schools serve students with relatives who have been affected by this national disaster. Our students have witnessed the tragic aftermath of this disaster. They will need our help. As we have done in the past during trying times and local, national and international crises, educators will be a source of healing for our students and their families.

In addition, I want to encourage you to consider how your school district might engage your students and community in responding to this disaster and providing assistance to those in need. In fulfilling our civic and social responsibility to our fellow citizens, we open paths to healing and offer our students lessons in citizenship and service learning. Please share with me and with neighboring schools any of your school projects that are effectively providing assistance in this time of need.

I encourage you to contact a reputable service agency for information on how your school can help in this critical relief effort. Gov. Jim Doyle has provided a list of relief agencies which can be found on the Office of the Governor's website < http://www.wisgov.state.wi.us/journal_media_detail.asp?prid=1325 >. Please be aware that some hurricane relief scams are already circulating on the Internet. You should contact service agencies directly and not respond to unsolicited e-mails requesting donations.

Thank you for your immediate attention and efforts for our fellow citizens in need. As we open our schools in welcome and extend assistance to the victims of this national disaster, we hope to bring relief and stability into the lives of so many displaced young people.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Burmaster
State Superintendent